NUSAYRIYAH: AN ESOTERIC LIVING RELIGIOUS SECT IN THE SECULAR MILIEUOF TURKISH REPUBLIC*

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ABSTRACT

The seet of *Nusayriyah* was founded by Abu Shu'ayb Muhammad Ibn Nusayr al-Basri an-Numayri who lived during the time of tenth, eleventh and twelfth Shiite leaders, i.e. 'Ali al-Hadi, al-Hassan al-'Askari and Muhammad al-Mahdi respectfully (3rd/9th century). *Nusayriyah* was originally a sect of Shi'ah. The *Nusayri* community has maintained itself for over one thousand years, fiercely clinging to its syncretistic secret religious belief and survived as a distinct group in spite of repeated persecution and the threat of extinction by the *Sunni* majority rulers who considered them pagans and heretics who were not eligible for the status of a protected religion. The *Nusayri*s contain three distinctive doctrines which have led them to be treated as heretics by Sunni Muslims. During the French occupation of Syria they were called *ai-Alawiyyeen* by the French colonizers who assigned them a state known as the State of *Alawiyyeen*, existed between 1920 and 1936. The people of *Nusayriyah* (the *Nusayri*s) are an Arabic speaking ethno-religious community, who live in the Latakiah province of Syria and the adjacent districts of northern Lebanon and southern Turkey. The *Nusayri*s who live in Turkey can speak Turkish too. Total number of *Nusayri*s world wide is 2.2 million. Of them 1.6 million which constitute 13% live in Syria where they constitute the largest minority group. The second largest group with 250 thousands people live in southern Turkey where they are known as *Alewis*, a Turkish name for all Shiite groups. The largest group of *Nusayri*s in Turkey lives in Hatay, Adana and Tarsus provinces.

In this article I examined *Nusayri*s' belief about incarnation, woman, Ali, and their religious leaders called sheikhs while researching the location, population, representation, and identity of them after the foundation of the Republic of Turkey as well as their relationships with other people, and their social statue.

Key Words: *Nusayriyah, Nusayri, Alawis, Muhammad Ibn Nusayr, Numayri*

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INTRODUCTION

Nusayriyah, Middle Eastern religious group, is a Shi'ite sect founded by Muhamad b. Nusair al-Namiri (270/883) in 9th century. When the French occupied the region in 1920 they used the term Alawi for Nusairis. Historically they had been called *Nusairis*, *Namiriya*, or *Ansariyya*. Nusayri had become a term of abuse and they preferred to be called Alawis to show their reverence for Ali, the son-in-law of the prophet Muhamad. To avoid confusion, in this paper we used the historical term *Nusayriyah* or Nusairiya.

In this paper, I will present their representation in the secular milieu of Turkish Republic. Turkey has an overwhelmingly Sunni Muslim population. Thus, it is maintained that some of general Islamic principles are not compatible with *Nusayriyah* belief. Indeed, *Nusayriyah* is such a religious sect that is out of Sunni tradition and refers itself to religion of Islam. This paper will also provide the historical background of *Nusayriyah* tradition that has influenced Turkey's demographic and social structure. The current legal status of *Nusayris* in Turkey and the related problems of *Nusayris* in contemporary Turkish society will also be discussed. Having described both the historical and current philosophies of Turkish Muslims and non-Muslims, I will explain foundational information to know how Islamic beliefs can be reconciled with *Nusayriyah* believes. The problem of naming of this sect will be first discussed and then I will shift to the problem of status of religion in Turkey. And then, I will present the current social and demographic situations in Turkey. Later I will detail the historical background of various religious traditions that have influenced Turkey's demographic structure. Then I will discuss the current legal status of *Nusayriyah* Islamic sect and describe problems of the sect presently faces. Finally, I will give a brief conclusion.

Regarding to the origin of the *Nusayriyah* title, there are various speculations. Some of them does not rely on the historical reality and are indeed fabricated. However, we can make a list like this: The name of Nusayriyah

1) Comes from Nasrani that is Christian.
2) Comes from Nazarini that is Christian in Latin.

3) Comes from Nasuraya that is a town nearby Kufa, Iraq.
4) Refers to the founder of the sect Muhammad b. Nusayr al-Numayri.[1]

Among them, the one that refers to the name of the founder is well known. In fact, the followers of this sect are also named as Numeyris or Namiris. Regarding to reason for their name with this title, Ashari says: "it is reported that from Râfıziyya, the followers of al-Namiri and the sect who are called as Namiriyya believe that God is reincarnated in al-Namiri."[2] İbn Nusayr claims that he was send as a prophet by the tenth imam of Shiite-Imamiyya, Ali en-Nakî; by saying very radical ideas he advocates the faith of reincarnation. Furthermore, He claims that al-Naki is a God and he changes the rules of Islam.[3]

However, Muhammad al-Tawil in his relevant work suggests another idea. It is that Muslim needed a supplementary army division when they were conquering the district of Baalbek and Humus. This necessary was salved by soldiers come from Iraq and Egypt and from Madina 450 people who accepted "Qadr Hum Agreement. This group was called later as "*nusayra*" which means "little helper". During these conquests, the mountainous area was called as "*Nusayra* Hill" and the local people as "*Nusayri*". It is also claimed that this group consists of Ansars of Madina comes from the family line of Kahtan.[4]

The followers of *Nusayriyah* sect, apart from this name, are called also Fallah, Son of Arabs in Turkey and because of French influence; they have been recently called Arab Alawites as well. The classical works evaluates them as the

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1 L. Massigman, "Nusayrîler", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, [Encyclopedia of Islam], İstanbul 1964, vol. IX. pp. 365-370; H. Halm, "Nusayriyya", *EI^2*, vol. VIII, pp. 145-148; al-Nawbahtî, *Fırakü'ş-Şîa*, [Sects of Shia], (edit. M.Sadık), Necef 1936, p. 93.

2 al-Asharî, *Makâlât al-Islâmiyyin*, [Sects of Islam], p. 26. Cf. al-Bagdâdî, *al-Farq Bayn al-Firaq*, [The Difference between the Sects], pp. 252, 255-56; al-İsferâînî, al-Tabsîr, p. 75.

3 al-Nawbahtî, *Fıraq al-Shî'a*, [Sects of Shia], p. 193; Ethem Ruhi Fığlalı, *Çağımızda İtikadi İslam Mezhebleri*, [Contemporary Religious Islamic Sects], p. 143. Cf. Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında*, [Nusayris and about the Nusayris], Ankara 1938, pp. 8-26.

4 Muhammad Emin Galib al-Tavil, *Tarih al-Alawiyyin*, [History of Alawiyyin], Bairut, n.d.

sub-fraction of Shiite.[5] They generally live in Mediterranean district in Turkey and predominantly exist in Syria and Lebanon.[6]

A. THE LEGAL STATUS OF RELIGION IN TURKEY: A GENERAL PERSPECTIVE

Secularism, one of the basic pillars of the Turkish Republic is enshrined in both the Constitution of 1982 and its two predecessors. Article 2 of the present Constitution describes the Republic as secular. Article 24 articulates the principle of freedom of religion and conscience and relates secularism with a right to freedom of conviction. This grants everyone "freedom of conscience, religious belief and conviction" qualified only by a limitation on the abuse of the fundamental rights and freedoms of other people. The Constitution permits believers to carry out rites of worship and to conduct religious services and ceremonies, but it also requires that "no one shall be compelled to worship, or to participate in religious ceremonies," and that "no one shall be allowed to exploit or abuse religion or religious feelings, or things held sacred by religion, in any manner whatsoever, for the purpose of personal or political influence, or for even partially basing the fundamental, social, economic, political, and legal order of the state on religious tenets." Turkey has no official state religion. The articles of the Constitution dealing with freedom of religion reflect the philosophical approach of modern states and provide for a certain conformity with Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either

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5 For example see: Ahmet Turan, *Les Nusayris de Turquie dans la region d'Hatay (Antioche)*, Ph.D. Thesis, Universite de Paris Sorbonne Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes VI section, Paris 1973; Mustafa Öz, *Tarihi ve Kültürel Boyutlarıyla Türkiye'de Alevîler, Bektaşiler, Nusayriler*, [Alawis, Baktashis and Nusairis in Turkey in the view of Historical and the Cultural], Istanbul 1999, pp. 181-193.

6 See: Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında*, [Nusayris and about the Nusayris], pp. 59-60; Louis Massignon, "Nusayrîler", *İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, [Encyclopedia of Islam], İstanbul 1964, vol. IX, p. 365.

alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."[7]

However, the Constitution also obligates the state to provide Muslim religious education in elementary and secondary schools. Ninety-nine percent of the population is Muslim in Turkey. Some of Turkish Muslims are Alawites. There is an institution known as the DIB, which is linked to one of the Ministers of State. This governmental institution is charged with the regulation of the religious life of all Muslims living within the country.[8]

B. THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF *NUSAYRIS*

Based on the sources, the founder of *Nusayriyah*, Ibn Nusayr al-Namiri lived in the periods of Ali al-Naki, Hasan al-Askari and Muhammad al-Mahdi, imams of twelver imamiyya and died in 270/883-884. In another report, it is claimed that Ibn Nusayr was in the position of BAB of Hasan al-Askari, the eleventh Imam and in the absent (gaybat) of Muhammad al-Mahdi, and that the position of *Bab* and *Marjiyat* was passed into him. However, twelvers say that he is pseudo-safir (messenger of imam) as they accept that the position of Safarat and Marjiyyat passed into Abu Amr Osman b. Said, Muhammad b. Osman, Husayn b. Salih and Muhammad al-Samarri after Muhammad Mahdi's absent.[9]

In Islamic sectarian history, it is generally said that Ibn Nusayr is the first person in Shiite in terms of radicalism. He was accepted the follower of Abdullah b. Saba, who claims that Aii is God, Bayan b. Sam'an (d. 119/737), who says that a divine part was reincarnated into Ali, Abu al-Khattab al-Asadi

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7 Niyazi Oktem, *Religion in Turkey*, Brigham Young University Law Review, yr. 2002, vol. 2, p. 386 etc.

8 Niyazi Oktem, *ibid*, p. 387 etc.

9 Muhammad b. Hasan al-Tusi, *Kitab al-Gayah*, [Book of Target], Kum 1411, pp. 398-399; Mustafa Öz, *Türkiye'de Aleviler, Bektaşiler, Nusayriler*, [Alawis, Baktashis and Nusayris in Turkey for the aspect of Historical and the Cultural], p. 182; Ethem Ruhi Fığlalı, *Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar Ansiklopedisi*, [Encyclopedia of Islamic Sects and Religious Order], İstanbul 1987, pp. 159-162.

(d. 143/760), who believe that the imams, in particular imam Jafar al-Sadiq are Gods, he is their messenger, and hence he was cursed by Jafaris and Mufaddal b. Omar al-Jufi (d. 180/796).[10]

After the death of Ibn al-Nusayr, Muhamad b. Jundub (d. III/IX) and then Ebu Muhamad b. Abdullah b. Muhamad el-Janan al-Junblilani (d. 287/900) took over, the leadership in the sect. Because of living in the district of Faris, Junblila town, having called as al-Junblilaniya, he was the founder of a Shiite denomination (tariqah). During his journey to Egypt, he managed to involve Husayn Hamdan al-Hasibi (260-358/874-969) into his denomination and after his death, Hasibi became the leader of the tariqah. The members of the denomination had supports from Ibn Firat, the minister of Abbasids during that time.

In the *Jabal al-Nusayriyah*, the mountain ranges of north-western Syria that overlook the Mediterranean Sea, the *Nusayriyah* community has maintained itself for over one thousand years, fiercely clinging to its syncretistic secret religion. The *Nusayris* have survived as a distinct group in spite of repeated persecution and the threat of extinction by the Sunni majority and rulers who considered them pagans and heretics who were not eligible for the status of a protected religion. Also known as *Nusayris*, they are an Arabic speaking ethno-religious community, who also live in the Lathakiah province of Syria and in the adjacent districts of northern Lebanon and southern Turkey. In recent years many *Nusayris* have moved to the large cities of Syria. A small number still survive in Wadi al-Taym south of Mt. Hermon.

Although it is difficult to discover the characteristics of a nomadic people, many scholars have described the history of the Turkish tribes in Central Asia, which goes back to the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. According to some scholars, the Turks of Central Asia were shamanists, so called because the preacher or holy man of such tribes, who interpreted divinity and possessed magic powers, is called a shaman by academics. But shamanism is not a

10 L. Massignon, "Nusayris", El, (E. J. Brill), new edition, Leiden 1993; Mustafa Öz, *ibid*, p. 182.

religion, it is a cult. As the Turkish tribes poured into Anatolia, they belonged to naturalistic, pantheistic religions such as Buddhism, Brahmanism, and Hinduism. Thereafter, many of the tribes adopted Mazdaist, Manichean, and Nestorian Christianity depending upon the prevailing religion of the areas to which they migrated. Not surprisingly, tribes living close to Persia adopted various forms of Zoroastrianism. Missionaries from the different religions sped up the process by actively endeavoring to convert the nomadic Turks, at the same time transforming many of them into more sedentary peoples. The Turks who converted often succeeded in creating a synthesis between their new beliefs and the beliefs of their former creeds.[11]

This entire process of religious aggregation was repeated when Muslim Arab invaders conquered Central Asia. Thus, the faith and theology of Anatolian Muslims is based on an aggregate blend of religious traditions, or what I term a "multidimensional harmonization of faiths." The result in modern Turkey is the existence of many diverse sects of Islam, including *Nusayriyah* tradition. The following part of the article will trace origin and the historical background of *Nusayriyah* sect.

C. THE ORIGIN AND THE FOUNDERS OF *NUSAYRIS*

After Ibn Nusayr, Muhammed b. Jundub (d. III/IX), Abu Muhammed Abdullah b. Muhammed al-Janab al-Junbulani (287/900) and Husayn b. Hamdan al-Hasibi took over the leadership of the sect. During the period of al-Hasibi Sayf al-Dawla in the province of Halab, al-Hasibi Sayf al-Dawla had a chance to extend his ideas and wrote his *Kitab al-Majmu'* that is accepted as a scripture for the sect. hence, al-Hasibi is a very crucial person in the sect for its acknowledge and spread around. After his death, Muhammad b. Ali al-Jili (d. 384/994?) and then Abu Said al-Meymun took over the leadership in the sect. In this period, *Nusayriyah* was not only politically empowered but also scholarly extended and improved. And lots of local tribes, particularly Tanuhis, converted

[11] Niyazi Öktem, *ibid*, pp. 371-373; Hasan Reşit Tankut, Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında [Nusayris and about the Nusayris], Ankara 1938, pp. 8-26.

into this denomination. After all that, Ismat al-Dawla (d. 700/1300), Hasan al-Acrud (d. 836/1432) and Muhammad b. Yunus ai-Kilazi (d. 1011/1602) were respectively in the position of the leaders in the sect.[12]

The sect lived in the provinces of Halab, Lazkiya, Jabal al-Nusayr, and Antioch and as other local sects, they also involved in political conflicts. In 1516 by the Ottoman conquest, they were under the rule of Christendom, Ayyubis and Mamluqs.[13] Although most of the population of the sect was living in Syria, after the conquest of Karmatis in 291/903 some of them were immigrated to the province of Antioch. However, during the period of Hamdanis, they found suitable location to live in peace and to improve. The following leaders of Hamdanis, in fact, worked on the favior of the sect in order to extend it around their area.

As a matter of fact, *Nusayris* took over the province of Antioch right after the Malazgirt War (463/1071) in the time of Saljuks. In 492/1098 when the Crusaders conquered the area, they lived under their ruling. During the Crusade time, Salahaddin Ayyubi punished them as they helped to the Crusaders.[14] And also as they helped to Mongols against Mamluks, they were restricted of some right by Sultan Baybars. They, however, existed in the area at all in the times of Salahaddin Ayyubi, Crosuders, Ismailis and Mongols. But, different period was started for the *Nusayris* after the conquest of Yavuz Sultan Selim in the Marjidabik War (922/1516). They were taken under controlled by Ottomans while they continued their sectarian identity in the area. However, whenever they found any opportunity they rebelled against the rule of Ottomans.

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12 Muhammad Emin Gâlib l-Tavîl, *Târihü'l-Aleviyyîn*, [Book of Target], Bairut n.d. p. 237 etc.; Mustafa Öz, "Nusayriyye", *Türkiye'de Alevîler Bektaşîler Nusayrîler*, [Alawis, Baktashis and Nusayris in Turkey], İstanbul, 1999, pp. 181-183. Cf. Hasan Reşit Tankut, Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında, [Nusayris and about the Nusayris], Ankara 1938, pp. 8-26.

13 See: Andrews Peter Alford (ed.): *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*. Wiesbaden 1989, pp. 151-154; Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien (Hrsg.): *Das ethnische und religiöse Mosaik der Türkei und seine Reflexionen auf Deutschland*. Münster 1998, pp. 122-123.

14 For example see: İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, yr. 2000, pp. 173-187.

Nusayris, which became a powerful political sect in 19th century Ottoman,[15] instead of an ethnical group, accepted the mandates of French and started to be called as Alawites. In 1937, by the decision of the Council, the city of Hatay joined into the Turkey and the *Nusayris* separated in different two countries.[16] After the World War Second they politically acted to take over the power and finally in 1970 they took over it with Hafiz Asad. Today, a small number of the follower also lives in Lazkiya and Jabal al-Nusayr, North Lebanon.[17] It is suggested that *Nusayris* in Southern of Turkey, Hatay, Iskenderun, Adana, Mersin and Tarsus have a different and peculiar character other then the countries.[18]

D. THE PLACE OF NUSAYRIS IN THE DEMOGRAPHIC STRUCTURE OF TURKEY

Before discussing the current legislative situation in Turkey, this section will address the sociological, demographic, and historical aspects of *Nusayris* in Anatolia. The population of Turkey today is estimated to be seventy-five million, of which ninety-nine percent are at least nominally Muslim. The great majority of Turkish Muslims are of the Sunni branch of Islam, as are a great

15 Mustafa Öz, "Nusayriyye", *Türkiye'de Aleviler Bektâşîler Nusayrîler*, İSAV, İstanbul (1999), p. 185.

16 Süheyr Muhammed Ali al-Fîl, *en-Nusayriyye*, [Nusayris], Cairo, 1410/1990, pp. 22-39; Ali Azîz al-İbrahim, *al-Alawiyyûn*, [The Alawis], Bairut 1415/1995, pp. 32-61; Mustafa Öz, *ibid*, pp. 183-186.

17 M. Öz, "Nusayriyye", p. 186. Cf. Kais Firro, "Nusayriliğin Milliyetçilik ve Milli Devlet Adaptasyonu", *Türkiye'de Aleviler Bektâşîler Nusayrîler*, [Alewis, Bektashis, Nusairis in Turkey], İSAV İstanbul (1999), pp. 210-211; Andrews, Peter Alford (ed.): *Ethnic Groups in the Republic of Turkey*. Wiesbaden 1989, pp. 151-154; Cf. Zentrum für Türkeistudien (Hrsg.): *Das ethnische und religiöse Mosaik der Türkei und seine Reflexionen auf Deutschland*. Münster 1998, pp. 122-123.

18 Süheyr Muhammed Ali al-Fîl, *en-Nusayriyye*, [The Nusayris], Cairo 1410/1990, pp. 22-39; Ali Azîz al-İbrahim, *al-Alawiyyûn*, [The Alawis], Bairut 1415/1995, pp. 32-61; Hasan Reşit Tankut, Nusayriler ve Nusayrilik Hakkında, [Nusayris and about the Nusayris], pp. 8-26; Mustafa Öz, *ibid*, pp. 183-186; Mahmut Reyhani, *Gölgesiz Işıklar II/Tarihte Aleviler*, [The Lights without Shadow II/Alawis in the History], İstanbul 1997, pp. 97-178; İlyas Üzüm, *ibid*, pp. 173-187.

majority of Muslims in the world. However, in Eastern Turkey, near the Iranian border, particularly among numerous villages in Kars, reside many fervent Muslims of the Shi'ite sect. There is also an important community of Shiites living in Istanbul. Shia literally means "party," "faction," or "sect," and denotes those Muslims who are faithful to the genealogical line of Ali, the cousin of Mohammad. Shi'ites believe that this genealogical line *(ahl-i beyt)* was inherited from Mohammad through his daughter Fatima, the wife of Ali, a divine light that is still transmitted through Ali's successors.[19]

Nusayris who has been lived in tribal system throughout the history has been existed in the provinces of *Jabal Ansariyya* Iskenderun and Kilikya. Today, they exist in Syria, Turkey and Lebanon.[20] In recent works in Turkey there are different statements about the population of the sect. I like to discuss only on the conclusion of inquiries about *Nusayriyah* population living in Turkey. In this regard, it is seen that the population is intensified in three cities and their proviences. It is achieved that they generally live in Antakya (Antioch), 6 town, in one towns of Dörtyol and Hassa City, in 20 towns of Iskenderun, in 23 town of Samandağ, and one town of Yayladağ (97towns in total). According to this data, Samandağ has the most population of *Nusayriyah* regarding to number of Town after Iskenderun. In his phd thesis on *Nusayris*, Ahmet Turan gives us detailed information about the population of this providence in 1973. According to this thesis, 45.000 in Antakya, 44.000 in Samandağ, 50.000 in Iskenderun, the population of *Nusayris* is 149.000 totally in Hatay.[21] Based on the official census in 1998, the total population of the provience is 1.258.410 and the Sunni population is 893.240, *Nusayriyah*

[19] Sharistani, *al-Milel wa al-Nihal*, (trs. Mustafa Oz), Litera Yayıncılık, Istanbul, 2008, p. 135; Niyazi Öktem, *ibid*, p. 374.

[20] For Nusairi population sees: H. Halm, "Nusayrîyya." *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), vol. VIII, p. 146.

[21] Ahmet Turan, *Les Nusayrîs de Turquie Dans la Region D'Hatay*, Paris 1973, pp. 75-81.

population is 348.000. That means that approximately 350.000-400.000 *Nusayriyah* population is living in Turkey now.[22]

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22 Andrews, *ibid*, pp. 379-382; Adem Tutar, *XX. Yüzyıl Hatay Tarihi ve Günümüz İnanç Coğrafyası* [Twentieth Century and Contemporary Religious Geography], (İnönü Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi), [İnönü University Institute of Social Sciences, Malatya 1997, p. 191; Mustafa Öz, *ibid*, p. 186. Cf. Kais Firro, "Nusayriliğin Milliyetçilik ve Milli Devlet Adaptasyonu", *Türkiye'de Aleviler Bektâşîler Nusayrîler*, pp. 210-211; İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, yr. 2000, pp. 173-187; Andrews, *ibid*, pp. 151-154; Ali Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye'nin Etnik Yapısı, Halkımızın Kökenleri ve Gerçekler*, Ankara 1999, p. 181.

23 For Nusayri population see: H. Halm, "Nusayrîyya", *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* (New Edition), vol. VIII, p. 146.

24 Ahmet Turan, *Les Nusayrîs de Turqttie Dans la Region D'Hatay*, Paris 1973, pp. 75-81; Andrews, *ibid*, pp. 379-382; Adem Tutar, *XX. Yüzyıl Hatay Tarihi ve Günümüz İnanç Coğrafyası* [Twentieth Century and Contemporary Religious Geography], (İnönü Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Doktora Tezi), [İnönü University Institute of Social Sciences, Malatya 1997, p. 191; Mustafa Öz, *ibid*, s. 186. Cf. Kais Firro, "Nusayriliğin Milliyetçilik ve Milli Devlet Adaptasyonu", *Türkiye'de Aleviler Bektâşîler Nusayrîler*, pp. 210-211; İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, yr. 2000, pp. 173-187; Andrews, *ibid*, pp. 151-154; Ali Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye'nin Etnik Yapısı, Halkımızın Kökenleri ve Gerçekler*, Ankara 1999, p. 181.

to be approximately 250,000 in Turkey. Worldwide they number 2.2 million people, of whom 1.6 million live in Syria where they constitute 13% of the population and are the largest minority group. The other cities, like Adana and Mersin where Nusayri population can be also exist are not as clear as that. This is because of their socialization with other people and also of that no any special inquiry has done for their population in these areas. Without giving any details, we know they are living in Seyhan and Yüregir's different districts and towns in Adana and Karatash. We can estimate their total population is between 50.000 and 120.000 in Adana[25] and in Mersin between 50.000 and 100.000.

E. THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF *NUSAYRIYAH* BELIEF SYSTEM

Their religion is secret and seems to be a syncretistic mixture of extreme Shi'a (Ghulat), ancient pagan, Gnostic and Christian elements. They are sometimes classified as a branch of Twelver Shi'ism, but are actually an independent religion. They do not keep the five pillars of Islam, and they have no mosques but meet in private houses for their religious observances. Their festivals include Persian and Christian holy days. They have a ceremony similar to the Christian mass and believe in a Trinitarian manifestation of God.

Their faith is generally existed in their scripture, *Kitab al-Majmu'*. The book is published by Muhammad Ahmad al-Hatib within the al-Harakât al-bâtiniyya (Maqtabat al-Aksâ, Ammân 1404/1984).[26] And also their faith is found in *el-Bâkûratü's-Süleymâniyye fî keşfi esrâri'd-diyâneiii'n-Nusayrîyye*, by Sulayman al-Âdani who was formerly *Nusayriyah* and later converted to Christianity.[27]

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[25] Cf. Andrews, *a.g.e.*, pp. 151-154; Ali Tayyar Önder, *Türkiye'nin Etnik Yapısı: Halkımızın Kökenleri ve Gerçekler*, Ankara, p. 181.

[26] Ahmet Turan, "*Kitab al-Mejmu*'nun Tercümesi," *On Dokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi İlâhîyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, Samsun 1996, vol. 8, pp. 5-18; Muhammed Ahmed el-Hatib, ei-Harekâtü'l-bâtınıyye, (Mektebetü'l-Aksâ, Ammân 1404/1984, pp. 400-410); Louis Massignon, "Nusayrîler," *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, vol. IX, pp. 366-367.

[27] İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, 2000, pp. 173-187.

Their faith is systematically categorized as in the four titles: Fasting, Taxation and Pilgrimage. *Nusayris* has changed the rituals of Islam esoterically. Hence they understand different things from Witnesses, and the other essentials of Islam. For them, the rituals of Islam like prayer, taxation and fasting are required for those who do not know the secrets of absolute truth. These regulations are exempted for those who do know that truth. The witness of *Nusayris* is written in "Nisbe Chapter" as like: "I witness that there is no God but Ali b. Abi Talib, There is no Hijab bu Muhammad al-Mahmud, There is no Bab but Salman al-Farisi."[28] Daily prayers are required only for elite people in the sect by worshipping on and knowing those who Ali, Muhammad, Hasan, Husayin and Fâtır (Fâtıma). On the other hand, the moon prayer refers to Muhammad, afternoon prayer to Fâtır, evening to Hasan, night to Husain and the morning to Muhsin.[29] The recitation during the prayer is from the Qur'an and also from *Kitâb al-Majmu*. For prayer it is necessary to direct towards the sun. All these suggest that they accept the esoteric understanding of Islam.[30]

Pligrimage is to know those who are very important in the sect. Therefore, from April they start to pilgrim to tombs and mausoleums where extensively exists in Hıdır al-Alvan nearby the province of Hatay, Dalyan town, in Hıdır al-Bahîr nearby Samandag, in Sheik Yusuf al-Hakim nearby Harbiye. These tombs are generally painted in white color. Fasting means to keep the secrecy that symbolizes the silences of Abdullah b. Abd al-Muttalib. Nevertheless, they also accept the mount of Ramadan as divine days as other Muslims and they called each day with the names of famous figures. Taxation means to give rich's money to the sheik.[31]

28 Süleyman el-Âzenî, *el-Bakûratu's-Süleymaniyye fî Keşfi Esrâri'd-Diyâneti'n- Nusayrîyye*, Beyrut, (1862), 14; Ahmet Turan, "Kitabu'l-Mecmu'u'nun Tercümesi," *OMUİFD*, vol. 8, Samsun (1996), pp. 10-11.

29 Sühayr Muhammad Ali al-Fil, *ibid*, pp. 87-88.

30 Muhammad Ahmad al-Hatîb, *el-Harekâtü'l-bâtıniyye*, Amman 1404/1984, p. 390; İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım," *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, 2000, pp. 173-187.

31 Sühayr Muhammad Ali al-Fil, *ibid*, pp. 85-93; Muhammad Ahmad al-Hatîb, *ibid*, pp. 390-393; Ethem Ruhi Fığlah, *Çağımızda İtikâdi İslâm Mezhepleri*, pp. 151-153.

Nusayris in Turkey generally rely on those rules. Hence, they do not generally go to Mosques for prayer. As a matter of fact, there was no mosque in their town. In the time of Abdulhamid the second, it is known that there are some mosque building in order to gain them to *ahl al-sunnah*. It can be easily observed that *Nusayris* in Turkey do not perform the rituals of Islam and they do not pilgrim. The number of who are fasting is so limited. However, who perform the taxation is quite huge. As the essential in *Nusayriyah*, reincarnation (metempsychosis) is well-extended. They believe that after the death, the soul can be rebirth in another body (taqammus: wearing another dress) which is differentiated according to religiosity of the every person. A believer does transform seven times in order to take his place in sky world. After dying person can rebirth as a Christian or Muslim until escaping from his sins. Who do not accept Ali is a God will be rebirth as horse, donkey etc.[32] this reincarnation faith is very famous in this sect. In this regard, City of Hatay is the best known. Jawdat Randa, a *Nusayriyah* scholars collect more than 300 stories and published it under the title of "*Tekrar Doganlar*" (Who was rebirth). For instance, a mother found his former son whose name is Mehmet Aslan who was born ageing 1987 as second birth. And she asked his "son" from new family. And the son claimed that his name was Ata Eryilmaz.[33]

The trinity of Mânâ, Isim, Bâb and the faith of Genesis is very important for *Nusayris*. "Mânâ" is Ali, "isim" is Muhammad, "bâb" is Salman-ı Fârisî which symbolized in the *Nusayriyah* literature as "ayn-mîm-sîn" (AMS). In *Kitab al-Mejmu'*, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, 11th, 12th, 13th and 14th chapters these symbols are intensively repeated. In 4th sure, in the subject of Genesis, it is suggested that Ali created Muhammad, Muhammad created Salman and he created the 5 honorable orphans and finally they created the world.[34] The orphans here are Midad b. Aswas who orders the nature, Abdullah b. Rawaha who orders the

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32 For reincarnation in Nusayri see: Sühayr Muhammad Ali al-Fîl, *ibid*, pp. 76-84.

33 For reincarnation in Nusayriyah, see Ayten Görgün, "İkinci Hayatlar," *Milliyet Gazetesi*, 06.10.2001; http://www.atemya.com/trans/orta.html;http://www.transmigrations.com/ingilizcediller.htm.

34 *Kitab al-Mejmu*, "al-Fath," p. 404.

beings, Othman b. Muz'um who orders the sustenance and illness, Abu Zar al-Gifari who orders the stars.

This "mâna-isim-bab" (significance-name-door) system is the same in *Nusayris* in Turkey. However, this is not explicitly propagated because the understanding of *Nusayris* is accepted as secrecy. Hence they do not share the ideas with others. This leads to create uneducated generations. The divinity of Ali is based on transcendental God. The God 6 times reincarnated into human and in the 7th times finally into Ali in the time of Muhammad. Those are:

Mânâ (Significance)	Isim (Name)	Bâb (Door)
Abel	Adem	Gabriel
Şît	Noah	Yabil b. Fâtin
Josef	Jacub	Ham b. Qush
Yuşa'	Moses	Dan b. Asyot
Asaf	Solomon	Abdullah b. Sinan
Batira	Jesus	Ruziya b. Marzuban
Ali	Muhamad	Salman

Therefore, the essential understanding of God in *Nusayris* relies on Ali's divinity. This is explicitly mentioned in this scripture, *Kitab al-Mecmu'*. In the first chapter first part, (*evvel*) Ali is represented as refuge and helper. In the second chapter, it is said that O! Ali, you are our secret God and our open Imam."[35] In the third chapter, the attitude of Eternity, Forgiver, etc. are given to Ali.[36] In the 11th chapter it said that "Your lord is Ali b. Abi Talib. Know him, Glory him. He is creator of you and who nourishes you.[37] In 12th chapter, "Ali b. Abû Talib is eternal, unique, one, samed (not beget nor be begetted), cannot be broken, cannot be separated, cannot be counted. He is my and your God." In 14th chapter, "Ali b. Abû Talib has no sister or brother, father or mother, he is only one and eternal, he is secret no covered."[38]

35 *Kitab al-mecmu*, pp. 400-401.
36 *ibid*, "Takdîs Abî Saîd", p. 402.
37 *Ibid*, "al-Shâdah", p. 407.
38 *Ibid*, "al-İmâmiyya", p. 408.

In Turkey at the present day, this faith is not represented by *Nusayris*.[39] Moreover, in various interviews with sheiks, they do not assert this faith. In particular the new generation has serious suspicions. We have no any statistical evidence, but it is well known that *Nusayris* have not any similar believing and they found that in fact very problematic. Hence, a Nusayri Sheik wrote a book dealing with the issue[40]. Regarding to Divinity, they traditionally divided into five sub sects: Ghaibiyya, Haidariyya, Murshids, Sun Sect (Shamsiya) and Moon Sect (Qamariya). Sects are oriented by tribe and based on the place of God. Shamsiya believe in Ali lives on the Sun and Qamariya believe in Ali lives on the Moon.

F. THE STRUCTURE OF RELIGIOUS HIERARCHY IN *NUSAYRIYAH* AND THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNAL RITUALS

In *Nusayris*, there are four types of religious men: grand sheikh, sheikh, nakeeb, and najeeb. The najeebs are the notable persons among people who help religious man during the religious ceremonies. They do not belong to the sheikh family. The nakeebs are the members of sheikh family who receive a training to be a sheikh. They however do not hold any significant role in religious ceremonies. The administration of the ceremonies and the privileges of receiving alms are in the authority of sheikhs only. The sheikhs are religious men who belong to the succession of a family who possesses a lineage earried over generation and generation. They have significant privileges in the society. There are also 'grand sheikhs' in modern *Nusayriyah*, who admin the ordinary sheikhs.[41]

Nusayriyah is a sect associated to a particular family lineage. The person who does not belong to a *Nusayriyah* family could not be accepted to the sect. Even, mere belonging to a *Nusayriyah* family does not qualify one to be

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39 İlyas Üzüm, "Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım", *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, 200, pp. 179-182.

40 Nasreddin Eskiocak, *Yaratıcı'nın Azameti ve Doğadaki Kudreti*, İstanbul 1997.

41 For furter information see: Sülayman el-Âzanî, *el-Bâkûrâtü's-Süleymâniyye*, [Secrets of Süleyman], Beyrut 1863, pp. 2-7.

accepted in the sect. First of all, you have to be a male since there is no religious responsibility for females with the exception of some special circumstances. Normally, women never be accepted to the sect, and the secrets of the sect can never be granted to them. The acceptance of men to the sect on the other hand requires a tri-staged ceremonial process. This process takes the following stages: First, a youngster who reached the age of puberty attends to a meeting called "the majlis of consultation." There he shows his intention of obedience by putting the sheikh's shoes on his head. Then, a cup of drink has been served to him. After forty days, the youngster is going to be accepted to another meeting called "the *majlis* of *malik*" where some of the secrets of the sect will be disclosed to him. After nine months from this meeting, in final stage of the process called "the ceremony of *da'wa*" the sheikh asks from the youngster to promise "to keep the secrets" in the witness of the attendees on his death if he betrays his promise. Upon his verbal pledge about this promise, the youngster becomes a full member of the sect by sipping of a special drink. This tradition is still alive in rural areas of Turkey, however in the cities, the number of the people who send their children to these ceremonies decreases, and this decline becomes faster and faster.

Before engaging to the examination of the notion of religious services in *Nusayri*s, it is crucial to touch upon the structure of their religious hierarchy. Although the classical sources of *Nusayriyah* identifies four classes of religious men, such as grand sheikh, sheikh, *nuwwab*, and imam, in practice, it can be acknowledged today only three classes of the entire *Nusayriyah* society: the religious scholars who are called sheikhs, their assistants nakeebs, and the ordinary believers. Of course, there is also a special hierarchy among the sheikhs according to their precedence of service as religious men in society. As for the religious services of the *Nusayri*s, they carry an esoteric character as it is the case for their belief system. Thus, except the pilgrimages and holidays they

have been practiced in secret. In the following pages, the main religious services of them will be examined briefly.[42]

G. RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS (*BAIRAMS*) OF *NUSAYRIS*

Religious festivals (*bairams*) bear a significant role in *Nusayris*' social and religious life. Thus there are many *bairams* in *Nusayriyah*, including the *bairams* of Ramazan, Kurban, (sacrifice) Gadir, Firash, Nevruz, Mihrijan, and Milad. The first two of them are general Muslim festivals while the second two belong to the Shiites. Nevruz and Mihrican have an Iranian/Caucasian origin while Milad comes from Christianity.[43]

The *Nusayriyah* society in Turkey wholly celebrates their traditional *bairams*. It can be argued that the most important things in their religious life are their *bairams*. The main reason for this is not their firm adherence to the tradition merely but is the existence of a mechanism to ensure the maintenance of those *bairams* in society. For instance, there is a special *bairam* for every family inherited from the ancestors. Each family has to celebrate these *bairams* each year by sacrificing an animal and serving its meat to the guests in addition to donate some money in support of sheikhs economically. The families who have no special *bairam* need to content themselves by giving charity. It is also possible for families who have *bairams* to share financial expenditures of the *bairams* to make easier to fulfill the obligation of the celebration. The most favorite *bairam* among the society, and the one performed the most by families is the *bairam* of Gadir. In this *bairam*, an animal has to be sacrificed and a meal called 'hirisi', which is a special kind of *ashura* includes meat, has to be prepared for the guests. This meal has to be served in a family's home, in an open public space or near to the tomb of Hidhir, after performing the religious

[42] For example see: İlyas Üzüm, Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, vol. 4, yr. 2000, pp. 173-187.

[43] Abdurrahman al-Badawî, *ibid.* vol. II, pp. 458-470.

services or prayers encouraging solidarity and social cooperation between families and individuals.[44]

H. THE NATURE OF RELATIONS BETWEEN *NUSAYRIS* AND THE OTHER ISLAMIC GROUPS

In Turkey, the *Nusayris* live in the cities of Hatay, Adana, and Mersin as homogeneous communities or mixed with Sunnis. They have good connections the Sunnis in Hatay, Adana and Mersin. Their social, religious, and in a certain extent, cultural relationships with the Sunnis are mostly friendly and positive. Although both communities are conscious about each other's sectarian affiliation, and have certain categorizations in their minds about the other, in actuality, there are no discriminations, hatred significant clashes conflicts between them in any aspects of social life. Of course, there are some disagreements argumentations between them in a minimal level however they live together and share educational institutions, sportive organizations, and cultural activities peacefully in their lives. There is no discriminatory tendency in their commercial activities as well. The members of both communities visit each other in circumstances of sadness and happiness such as the death of a relative, illness, wedding, and bairams.[45] Thus, a generation of *Nusayris* has been raised among the *Nusayris* who apply Qur'anic principles in their lives with a great appreciation. And, even though some bitter and unpleasant events have taken place in the past, both communities are experiencing a mutual understanding today. The idea that the respect to each other's belief in a multi religious society is a prerequisite of life is becoming a shared vision of both communities. Especially among the new generation it is almost a common wisdom that to be in conscious of one's own religion does not give one to see the others' religion inferior.

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[44] Hüseyin Öztürk, "Hatay'da Gadir Bayramı", [Gadir Festival in Hatay], *Folklor/Edebiyat,* vol. 26, yr. 2001/2, pp. 89-96. See also: İlyas Üzüm, Türkiye'de Alevî/Nusayrî Önderlerinin Eserlerinde İnanç Konularına Yaklaşım, *İslâm Araştırmaları Dergisi,* Vol. 4, yr. 2000, pp. 173-187.

[45] Abdulhamid Sinanoğlu, *Nusayrîlerin İnanç Dünyası ve Kutsal Kitabı,* [Believes of Nusayris and Their Holy Book], İstanbul 1997, pp. 197-202; *Türkiye'de Alevîler Bektâşîler,* [Alawis and Baktashis in Turkey], pp. 207-208.

For the relationship between *Nusayris* and Alawis, since Ali b. Abi Talib, the son-in-low of the Prophet, is the central figure in tradition of both communities, it is expected that their relationship would be more welcoming and close. However, there is no indication of this, and the relationship between them seems quite neutral. Lastly it should be mentioned that there is rarely inter-sects marriages between *Nusayris* and both Sunnis and Alawis lately.

CONCLUSION

For us, *Nusayriyah* is the most authentic branches of 1350 years of esoteric tradition within the context of Islam (Alawism). They are in the adherence of the divinity of Ali. It can be concluded that the main dynamic in their survival for centuries along in a multi religious environment, must be their principle of *takiyya* (dissimilation) which required them to keep some of their own religious convictions in secret even from the ordinary people of their own belief. Today, there are about three million *Nusayris* in Turkey and Syria together as a distinctive Arabic population who has their own tradition and culture.

Turkey constitutes an important bridge between the East and the West, not only by virtue of its geographic position, but also because of its historical and cultural background. As a cultural and racial entity, Turkish Anatolia is an mixture of different ethnic groups and civilizations. Having come from Central Asia, Persia, Arabia, the Mediterranean, and the Balkans, the people today called Turks have experienced and absorbed elements from many different cultures. For this reason, Turkish interpretation of Islam is multidimensional and multicolored in many of its aspects. It is not rigidly sectarian like that of many of the regimes in this geographical area.[46] Of course, Turkey is an old society, and so inevitably has brought with it some culture and custom incompatible with modem conceptions of human rights.

Religion is an enduring and important factor in the political and social life of all countries, including those that make up the Christian world. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to place the problems of religion in Turkey in their worldwide context, and to see them from an objective viewpoint.

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46 Niyazi Öktem, "Religion in Turkey", *Brigham Young University Law Review*, Provo: 2002, Vol: 2002, Iss: 2; pp. 371-373.